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AUTHOR Risinger, C. Frederick
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ABSTRACT

The purposes of this paper are to identify the current trends in social studies curriculum and teaching strategies and to make some projections about the future. Three conflicting movements, or paradoxes, are identified. The first paradox is the back-to-the-basics movement vs. an expanded curriculum. This is due to conservative reactions to useless courses and teaching methods that change basic American values, which conflict with a trend toward broader, more diversified curricula that deemphasize traditional courses. A conflict between emphasizing the individual vs. creating a responsible "community-ship" is the second paradox. On one side is a trend toward exploring feelings and values, and on the other is renewed emphasis on responsible participation in the community. The third paradox involves interest in the local community vs. global awareness. An increasingly fragmented society causes family relationships and background to become more important but also creates the need for global studies and global education. It is advised that educators use parts of all the trends to create a new, synthesized curriculum. Conflicts involved in the first paradox appear to be nonresolvable, the second is a choice that must be made, and the third conflict will probably continue for a long time. It is the teacher's responsibility to know these trends so they can make qualified curriculum decisions and choices. (ND)

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TRENDS IN SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION: IT'S OUR RESPONSIBILITY by C. Frederick Risinger

My task in this article is to briefly look at the present trends in social studies curriculum and teaching strategies. At the conclusion, I'll try to forecast where these trends might lead for social studies teachers and students in the 1980's.

This task is not an easy one. In 1974, I reviewed the "new social studies revolution" for the National Association of Secondary School Principals' Curriculum Bulletin and tried to suggest future trends. At the time, I was relatively certain where social studies education was heading. My certainty has been somewhat eroded in these past two years. While not pessimistic about the future, I think that significant decisions will be made locally, on the state level, and nationally in the next few years. It is absolutely essential that social studies teachers be aware of these choices and become involved in the decision-making process.

Why are choices necessary? Because there are no clear-cut trends in social studies education. Instead of easily discerned trends, there are several paradoxical or conflicting movements currently vying for ascendancy. Simply speaking, these social studies paradoxes are representatives of similar conflicting trends in American society. The remainder of this article focuses on three of these conflicting movements. Directly or indirectly, each of these decisions is being made in each school district at the present time. Hopefully, this article will stimulate open and concerted discussion at all levels of social studies education. Without this discussion, teachers and department heads may find these major decisions will be made for them.

Paradox Number 1--Back to the Basics vs. An Expanded Curriculum

The "Back to the Basics" movement is gaining momentum throughout the nation. It is fueled partly by conservative reactions to what are considered "useless" courses and teaching designed to erode basic American values. It derives additional support from those genuinely concerned with declining scores on standardized tests and our students' inability to read or write effectively. "Back to the Basics" has resulted in the elimination of courses like sociology (too negative; focuses only on America's problems) and topics such as value analysis (unnecessary; destructive of family cohesiveness and parental teaching). It has generated more interest in developing courses and units designed to teach map skills, research skills, and skills like analyzing political cartoons or editorials. A major dilemma of the movement is that its proponents do not seem to be able to agree on just what the "basics" should be.

The conflicting part of this paradox is the trend toward a broader, more diversified curriculum which de-emphasizes some of the more traditional course like American history. Some of the support for this movement comes from proponents of the "new" (now old) social studies of the 1960's. They believed that infusing the concepts and generalizations of the social sciences into the elementary and secondary social studies curriculum would improve both the knowledge and analytical ability of Americans. Additionally, a concern for meeting the needs of individual students has led to a wide variety of elective courses being added to the curriculum. Behavioral science courses such as sociology and psychology are growing rapidly in both number and student enrollment. At York High School in suburban Elmhurst, Illinois, for example, more than 400 students are enrolled in 17 sections of psychology. This typifies what I mean by "paradoxical trends." In some schools, courses in the behavioral sciences are being eliminated. In others, they are expanding rapidly. As social studies educators, we must be aware of and involved in these decisions.

Paradox Number 2--Individualism vs. Responsible "Community-ship"

The conflict between these two trends is not so direct nor intense as Paradox #1. However, it exists and represents another of the decisions that are currently being made in social studies education.

On one side is the emphasis on the individual. Students are encouraged to explore their own feelings and values. They are urged to "get in touch with themselves" and to develop a personal sense of autonomy. This trend (like the others) is transcendental--leaping subject matter boundaries and extending into the extra-curricular program. The "carryover" or "lifetime sports" movement in physical education exemplifies this trend and is an example of how these issues are important to all educators, not just those in the social studies. In the social studies curriculum, this trend is observable in three ways. First, the addition of courses like psychology, values analysis, and others encourage self-examination and personal awareness. Second, already existing courses such as Problems of Democracy, and Social Problems, are being restructured to include units and activities designed to achieve self-realization. Finally, several schools are instituting a program of mini-courses. Ranging from two to nine weeks in length, many of these short courses are developed to meet the interest/demand of students to engage in self-exploration aimed toward personal awareness and autonomy.

The opposite end of this paradoxical continuum is represented by a renewed emphasis on responsible participation in the community. I use the term "community-ship" to go beyond the commonly used expression "responsible citizenship." "Citizenship" is frequently defined in a limited manner--referring to government and obedience to laws. Community-ship is broader and more positive. Responsible community-ship results in active participation in the social, economic, and political life of the community. Students engage in "community service-type courses," study about the structure and operation of organizations, and practice skills of discussion and conflict-resolution. For example, a K-8 school near South Bend, Indiana, recently conducted an afternoon workshop dealing with community participation and responsible citizenship. Teachers and administrators were concerned about vandalism in the schools and how the instructional program could be used

to promote positive school attitudes. Many schools have instituted courses and programs where students participate in political campaigns, work in community-service agencies, and even initiate programs of community improvement. Currently, a National Science Foundation-supported curriculum project at Indiana University is developing a 12th grade course that would fit into this category. Titled "Comparing Political Experiences," the course helps students study the school, businesses, and labor organizations as political systems. They are encouraged to actively participate in the political process through practice in school organizations and development of political participation skills.

This paradox--that of individual self-awareness and responsible community-ship--does not necessarily involve mutually exclusive strategies. In many courses that encourage community understanding and participation, the first steps may involve self-awareness. But in too many schools, a decision is consciously or unconsciously made for one approach to the virtual exclusion of the other.

Paradox Number 3--Locality vs. Global Awareness

This paradoxical situation is interrelated with the previous two. Once again, there is no reason why these two trends should necessarily be in conflict. But both are strong trends, and in some schools, one may exclude the other.

Interest in the local community--whether a rural area, a town, or an urban neighborhood--is rapidly growing. This trend is more than the traditional "neighborhood" study at the 3rd grade level, 5th grade field trips to the dairy, or 12th grade visits to local courtrooms. Instead, local history is studied, the religious background of the community and the local impact of it is assessed, and future community planning activities become an integral part of the classroom. Emphasis is also placed on family relationships and background. Indeed, "family history" is rapidly becoming a field of its own, and students are encouraged to trace their heritage with their parents. It is likely that this emphasis on locality, with its concomitant interest in family history and structure, will continue to be a strong trend in the social studies.

Equally strong, however, is the trend toward global education. Currently this trend is receiving a great deal of publicity. Major publishers are issuing books and other materials related to global concerns like food, population, and energy. Public and private funding agencies are also lending their support to global awareness. An example is the Lilly Endowment-supported Mid-America Program for Global Perspectives in Education. Based at Indiana University, the project seeks to identify, coordinate, and facilitate global issues in Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, and Kentucky. Similar programs are being initiated at various levels throughout the country.

Global studies goes far beyond the international studies of the 1950's and 1960's. These courses were usually taught as "area studies"--African Studies, Latin American Studies, or Asian Studies. While these courses do improve international understanding, it is becoming increasingly evident that the problems of the late 20th and the 21st centuries transcend not only national, but regional boundaries as well. Global education is not just a

unique and interesting curriculum trend; it is rapidly becoming an essential facet of education for tomorrow's citizens.

Throughout the discussion of these three paradoxical trends in social studies education, I have hinted at the thrust of this conclusion. Teachers and supervisors must become knowledgeable about these movements and actively involved in the choices. The best approach, it seems to me, is to utilize components of all the trends to create a new, synthesized curriculum. Only Paradox Number 1 has the seeds of unresolvable conflict. And few of us, no matter where we fall on the political spectrum, would argue that either the "Back to the Basics" or the "Expanded Curriculum" trend is entirely without merit. Of all the trends, I believe that Global Education is the strongest and possesses more longevity than some of the others. But all of them have advocates, and all must be considered in developing the curriculum of the future.

And the responsibility for choosing from among the various current movements in social studies falls directly on the social studies departments and in-service education. No longer can we depend on an influx of well-trained, highly enthusiastic, first-year teachers to bring new ideas and vitality into the profession. New or vacant social studies positions are becoming virtually non-existent. Neither can we depend on federal or state-supported summer institutes and workshops to re-train experienced teachers and keep us up-to-date on recent trends. Public and private support for these program has dwindled in recent years. Instead, it is the responsibility of the curriculum supervisor, principal, department chairperson, and the individual teacher. It is a responsibility that we must accept--or accept the decisions and choices made solely by less qualified, single-issue pressure groups.

C. Frederick Risinger is Coordinator of School Social Studies at Indiana University. Prior to taking this position he was Social Studies Department Head at Lake Park High School, Roselle, Illinois and Teacher Associate at the Social Science Education Consortium, Boulder, Colorado. He has been active in state and national social studies councils as well as being a teacher, author, workshop leader, and curriculum materials developer.

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